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Geisha, Geiko or Maiko, the difference explained.

Geishas and Maikos both wear the kimono, have the complicated hairstyle, and iconic white makeup with red lips. The only difference between them is where they come from. **In Kyoto, these women are called Geiko whilst in Tokyo, they are known as Geisha.**

Kyoto, once the capital of Japan, is a city on the island of Honshu. It's also known for formal traditions such as kaiseki dining, consisting of multiple courses of precise dishes, and geisha, female entertainers often found in the Gion district.

Geishas and Maikos are world famous for being some of the most long-standing examples of Japanese culture and tradition. The art of being a Geisha/Geiko is something that is still practiced today – unlike other Japanese traditions such as samurai.

These Geisha/Geiko entertainers have been around for centuries and continue to entertain guests even now with dancing, music, games, as well as pouring drinks, and being great conversationalists.

A Geisha or Geiko is a woman trained in the art of music, singing, and dancing, often including the traditional stringed instrument shamisen, and various dances that celebrate the changing seasons. They are also trained to elegantly move and pour drinks, speak eloquently, and to be charismatic and charming.

To put it simply, **a Maiko is an apprentice geiko/geisha.**

A Maiko is a younger woman or even a child who is training in the arts of the Geisha and Geiko. The literal meaning of “Maiko” is “dancing child”. In Tokyo, an apprentice geisha is also known as a hangyoku, which means “half-jewel”; they used to be paid half of that of a fully qualified geisha. Even today, a difference in price in performances of geisha might help you figure out whether a Maiko or a real full-fledged Geisha/Geiko will be performing.

Anyone else dressed up wearing the kimono, having the complicated hairstyle, and iconic white makeup with red lips, are tourists. Particularly if they allow their photographs to be taken, real Geishas and Maikos, only allow photos during paid performance. Those dressed up on the streets are most likely Japanese tourists, as kimono hire is a big business in places like Gion in Kyoto.



A real Maiko performing a tea dance at the Shozan Resort in Kyoto.



A real Geiko, umbrella in hand, shopping in Gion, Kyoto.